

WORKFORCE HORIZONS

Planning Tomorrow's Workforce Today

Louisiana Department of Civil Service

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TELECOMMUTING GUIDELINES FOR EMPLOYERS

21ST century innovations in computers, remote connectivity, voice and electronic communications have made telecommuting an increasingly used option among employers including government. Telecommuting or telework can be defined as “work arrangements in which an employee regularly performs officially assigned duties at home or other work sites geographically convenient to the residence of the employee.”¹ It is generally distinguished from mobile work such as a roving recruiter or trainer who may spend most of his or her time “on the road” and out of the office but is not physically performing at a different site work they would normally do in the office.

For the employer, telecommuting offers benefits such as

QUOTE OF THE DAY

“Commuting to office work is obsolete. It is now infinitely easier, cheaper and faster to ...move information...to where people are.”
– **Peter F. Drucker**

- Recruiting and retaining workers – especially workers who value work/life balance and younger workers who expect a workplace that is technologically forward-thinking
- Helping employees manage long commutes or other work/life issues that might otherwise affect their work performance or retention
- Reducing traffic congestion, emissions and infrastructure impact in urban areas, thereby improving the environment
- Saving taxpayer dollars by decreasing government real estate costs
- Ensuring continuity of essential government functions in event of an emergency (e.g. extended office closures due to hurricane damage)

Telecommuting is most frequently offered on a part-time basis, i.e. for only certain

days of the week or month but can be full-time. It is usually also only offered to some employees, but theoretically could be made a way of doing business for almost everyone thereby greatly reducing the need to rent or own office space. Sometimes employers set up telework centers to facilitate telecommuting. This is “office space” that requires less real estate and costs less than a traditional office because there are no individual offices or cubicles. Instead, a community space with sofas, tables, phones, fax, computers, laptops, etc. is provided to be used by various telecommuters in a particular area.

Telecommuting is best implemented strategically, taking into account the needs and work of the group rather than simply granting or denying requests piecemeal. Some guidelines for successful telecommuting are given below:

Have a written telecommunication policy. Among other things this should lay out the eligibility requirements to participate in telecommuting. For example, some jobs may not lend themselves to telecommuting if they require the employee’s physical presence in the office. Such jobs would be designated as ineligible for telecommuting. You might also want to establish minimum standards for participation such as having permanent status or achieving a minimum rating on the PPR.

Have the telecommuting employee sign a written agreement. This will outline expectations and responsibilities of the employee and employer. A good agreement will include the following:

1. Location of the telework office (e.g., home, telework center, other)

2. Equipment inventory – what the employee is providing and what the agency is providing
3. In general, the job tasks to be performed while teleworking
4. The telework schedule
5. Telework contact information (e.g. phone numbers, email address to be used on telework days)
6. Safety checklist – certifying home office meets certain standards
7. Security responsibilities – employees must take responsibility for the security of correspondence, data, files, etc. that they will handle while teleworking. This will include following security protocols for remote connectivity.
8. Expectations for emergency telework (specify whether employee is expected to telework in the case of a COOP event, pandemic health crisis, shutdown of operations, etc.)

Manage expectations and communications.

It is important that the telecommuting employee and his or her supervisor or manager can communicate when necessary and have a shared understanding of what is expected of each. Here are some questions that need to be answered up front.

- ✓ How will the manager know the work is being accomplished? What are the reporting procedures to keep the manager apprised of the status of pending work or the completion of assignments?
- ✓ What is the telework schedule? Is the employee expected to be available for the manager to contact at any time during this schedule?

- ✓ How will the manager contact the teleworker when she needs to (phone, email)? What is the expected response time on the part of the employee?
- ✓ What equipment is provided by the employee and what by the employer? Who provides technical assistance in case of an equipment disruption?
- ✓ How does the teleworker communicate with co-workers when assistance is needed? How do co-workers communicate with the teleworker?

LOUISIANA MEDICAID'S WORK@HOME PROGRAM

DHH /Medicaid is currently implementing a telecommuting program called Work@Home. The program allows eligible employees to work from home or in a satellite location for all or part of their regular work week. The Phase 1 pilot began 6/30/08 and includes 20 participants, primarily frontline eligibility determination workers. However there are plans to expand the program to include up to 160 employees including supervisors and managers by the end of the fiscal year.

For more information on this innovative program contact:

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IS TELECOMMUTING RIGHT FOR ME? – WHAT EMPLOYEES NEED TO KNOW

There are a lot of guidelines out there for employers on telecommuting, but what about the employee? How do employees decide whether telecommuting is right for them? What do they need to ask or know?

What's in it for the employee?

Telecommuting offers employees advantages such as

- Work / life balance – more flexibility to handle professional and personal responsibilities
- Reducing stress by reducing commuting time and adding to discretionary or personal time
- Freedom from office distractions – the alternative environment can allow the employee to focus and be more productive. (However, the employee must make sure the alternative environment does not have its own distractions)

Do a self-assessment. Ask yourself these questions to decide whether telecommuting is right for you.

1. Can I work independently without close supervision?
2. Do I have sufficient portable work for the amount of telecommuting work being proposed?
3. Am I comfortable using the technologies required for the telecommuting work?
4. Do I have suitable space at home to set up the required equipment and do

the work comfortably, effectively, efficiently and safely?

5. Does my home office space provide sufficient security (e.g., locked file cabinets) for confidential materials I may be handling?
6. Is my communication with my supervisor / manager, co-workers and clients good enough that I can make a relatively smooth and seamless transition from on-site to off-site?
7. Do I have dependent care arrangements in place for children or elderly adults such that this will not be a distraction or interrupt work?

Plan your telework each day. Successful telecommuting requires planning and discipline on the part of the employee. To be as productive as possible when telecommuting, the employee should schedule specific hours to work each day and have specific assignments and targets to complete. The employee should also ask these questions:

- ✓ What files or other documents will I need to take with me when I leave my regular workplace the day before telecommuting?
- ✓ What equipment will I need to take (e.g. laptop)?
- ✓ Who needs to be notified that I will be telecommuting?
- ✓ What other steps do I need to take before leaving the office (e.g. forwarding the phone, arranging for forwarding messages received while I am out)?
- ✓ In case of emergency, what should I have at all times at my home to

enable me to function without coming on-site to retrieve materials?

Following steps like these, there is no reason telecommuting can't be mutually beneficial to the agency and the employee.

WORKFORCE PLANNING MAXIM OF THE DAY

"There are three constants in life... change, choice and principles." – Stephen Covey

¹The information in these articles is adapted from the U. S. Office of Personnel Management's publication OPM-VI-I "A Guide to Telework in the Federal Government.

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Purpose: The purpose of the Workforce Horizons is to educate readers about workforce planning issues and best practices, inform them about upcoming Civil Service workshops and training related to workforce planning and to provide practical job aids to assist agencies with workforce planning.

Comments and submissions: We welcome questions about workforce planning and suggestions for improvements to the newsletter as well as submissions of articles about what your agency is doing in workforce planning. Questions and comments should be sent to the editor.

Current and Back Issues may be viewed by going to the workforce planning portal of the Civil Service web page at www.civilservice.louisiana.gov